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QUASAR™

ANDY SMITH '93

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WENDELL VAUGHN. . . THE FIRST EARTH MAN EVER APPOINTED PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE. BONDED TO THE ENERGY-TRANSFORMING QUANTUM-BANDS THAT ARE BOTH WEAPONS AND SYMBOLS OF HIS STATION, HE FIGHTS AN ONGOING BATTLE TO DEFEND ALL LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE FROM COSMIC EVIL!

QUASAR

Stan Lee presents

IN THE FLORIDA EVERGLADES, THERE EXISTS A CREATURE LIKE NOTHING ELSE ON EARTH.
ONCE HUMAN, THIS HULKING, MUCK-DWELLING ORGANISM IS NOW MORE PLANT THAN ANIMAL.
NEITHER HUNTER, NOR PREY, IT DERIVES ITS SUSTENANCE FROM THE SINGULAR PROPERTIES OF THIS PARCEL OF SWAMPLAND WHERE ALGAE AND ALCHEMY INTERMINGLE.
THOUGH MONSTROUS IN FORM, THE MUCK-BEING IS NOT EVIL. INDEED, IT LACKS THE INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY TO BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT EVIL IS.
CONVERSELY, IT CANNOT TRULY BE CONSIDERED GOOD. THE MOST APT DESCRIPTION OF ITS NATURE MIGHT BE "USEFUL."
FOR THE CREATURE -- DUBBED THE MAN-THING BY THE LOCAL POPULACE -- HAS A UNIQUE ROLE TO PLAY IN THE COSMIC SCHEME OF THINGS...
...AND BEFORE THIS DAY COMES TO AN END, IT WILL BE OBLIGED TO FULFILL ITS FUNCTION...

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HORIZON OF HOLES
HOW DID THIS NEXUS COME TO BE? NO ONE KNOWS.
WHY IS THE NEXUS HERE? NO ONE KNOWS.
HOW MANY NEXUSES ARE THERE IN THE UNIVERSE? NO ONE KNOWS.
THE MAN-THING, YOU SEE, HAS BEEN APPOINTED THE GUARDIAN OF EARTH'S NEXUS OF REALITIES, AN AREA WHERE THE FABRIC OF SPACE/TIME IS EXCEEDINGLY THREADBARE.
WHO APPOINTED THE MAN-THING EARTH'S NEXUS-GUARDIAN? NO ONE KNOWS.
WHAT SPECIAL QUALIFICATIONS DOES A MINDLESS SWAMP-MONSTER HAVE FOR THE ROLE? NO ONE KNOWS.
BUT TODAY, WHEN THE NEXUS IS ACTUALLY VISIBLE THROUGH THE HEAVY SWAMP AIR, ALL QUESTIONS SEEM TO LOOM OMINOUSLY...
...THE MAN-THING INSTINCTIVELY LUMBERS TOWARD IT AS IF WAITING FOR SOMETHING...

...AND ALL OVER THE WORLD, THOSE WITH MYSTICAL AFFINITIES SUDDENLY BECOME AWARE THAT SOMETHING MOMENTOUS IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN ON THIS SQUARE ACRE OF SWAMPLAND...
DR. STEPHEN STRANGE
ARCANNA JONES, ALIAS MOONGLOW
DR. ANTHONY DRUID
JENNIFER KALE
DR. MICHAEL TWOYOUNGMEN, ALIAS SHAMAN
MODRED THE MYSTIC

AT THAT MOMENT, IN NEW YORK CITY, AN EVENT HAS TRANSPIRED THAT WILL SOON HAVE A DIRECT BEARING ON THE TABLEAU JUST SEEN...

KAYLA BALLANTINE, A SECRETARY FROM STATEN ISLAND, HAD UNTIL MERE MOMENTS AGO, BEEN POSSESSOR OF THE STARBRAND, A TATTOO FROM A DISTANT UNIVERSE BESTOWING UNTOLD POWER...

FEELING SHE HAD USED ITS POWER IRRESPONSIBLY, SHE SOUGHT TO GET RID OF IT BY ANY MEANS, AND SO PASSED IT ALONG TO HER FRIEND, HOLLY STECKLEY--

--WHO TURNED OUT NOT TO BE HER FRIEND, BUT INSTEAD SOMETHING DARK AND SINISTER... ERESHKIGAL!

WHAT... HAVE... I... DONE?

YOU HAVE ALLOWED YOURSELF TO BE *TRICKED*, MY DEAREST FRIEND.

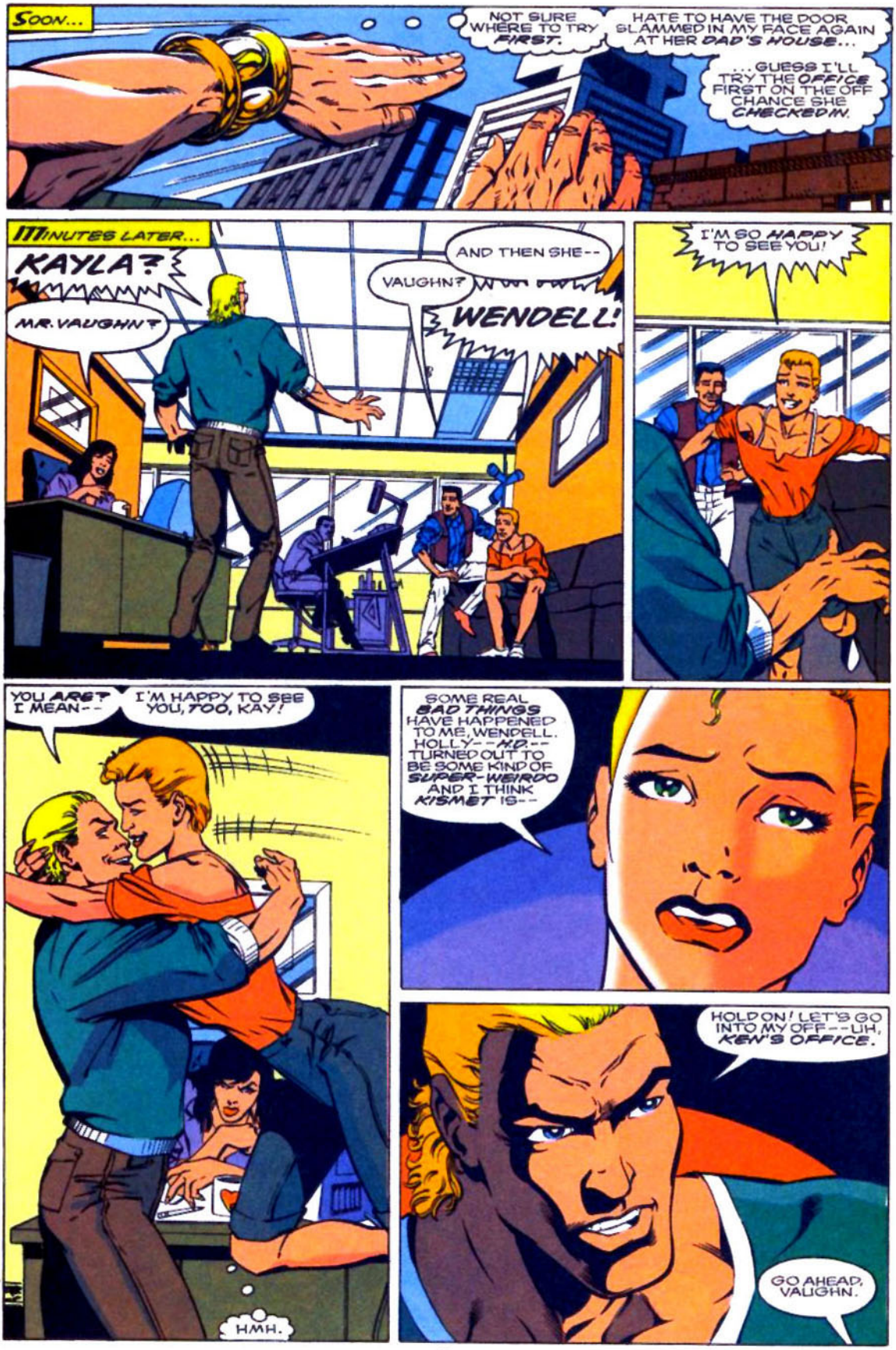
DON'T FEEL SO BADLY. IN THE MANY MILLENNIA OF MY EXISTENCE I'VE MANAGED TO *SIMILARLY TRICK* PERSONS OF *FAR* GREATER INTELLIGENCE THAN YOU.

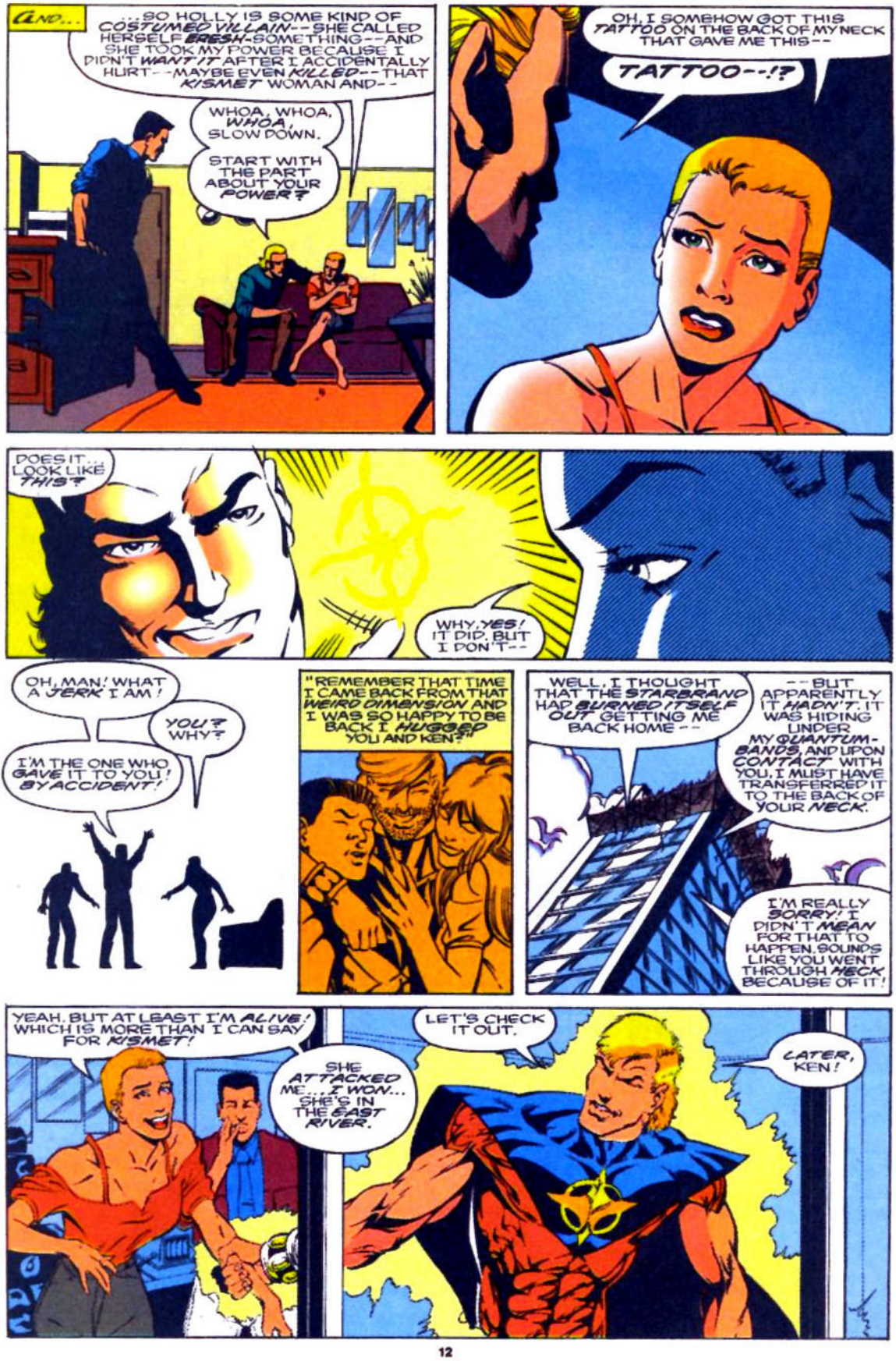
BUT WHY? *HOW?*

I COVET POWER...
"...AND WHEN I LEARNED THAT THE PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE WAS A MERE MORTAL MAN, I ADOPTED THE IDENTITY RECENTLY ABANDONED BY THAT MINOR TELEPATH, MOONDRAGON.
"...IN ORDER TO GET CLOSE TO QUASAR.
"BUT THEN YOU ACQUIRED THE STARBRAND, A FAR MORE POTENT POWER-SOURCE THAN EVEN QUASAR'S QUANTUM-BANDS...
"...AND SO I CONSPIRED TO GET CLOSE AND STAY CLOSE TO YOU.
"WHAT A GREAT FRIEND YOU HAD, YOU MUST HAVE THOUGHT, WHEN I CHOSE TO FOLLOW YOU INTO THAT PORTAL THAT CREEP, QUAGMIRE, MANEUVERED YOU INTO.
"SORRY, BUT MY SOLE MOTIVATION WAS KEEPING MY EYE ON THE BRAND.
AND AS WE SLOSHED ALONG AT THE MERCY OF VARIOUS ALIENS, I COULD HAVE SAVED US AT ANY TIME--
--BUT ONLY BY TIPPING MY HAND AS TO MY TRUE NATURE.
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT--YOU'RE ACTUALLY EVIL?
MMM, NOT REALLY, JUST MOTIVATED IN A VERY EGOCENTRIC MANNER.
NOW THEN, HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE WHAT THE STARBRAND CAN REALLY DO IN THE RIGHT HANDS?
NO THANKS.
TOO BAD. I'VE ACTUALLY GOTTEN USED TO YOUR COMPANY.
GOODBYE, KAYLA, AND THANKS FOR EVERYTHING.
OH, BE A DEAR AND DO NOTHING TO BETRAY ME. I'D HATE TO HAVE THE MEMORY OF OUR FRIENDSHIP SOUR.

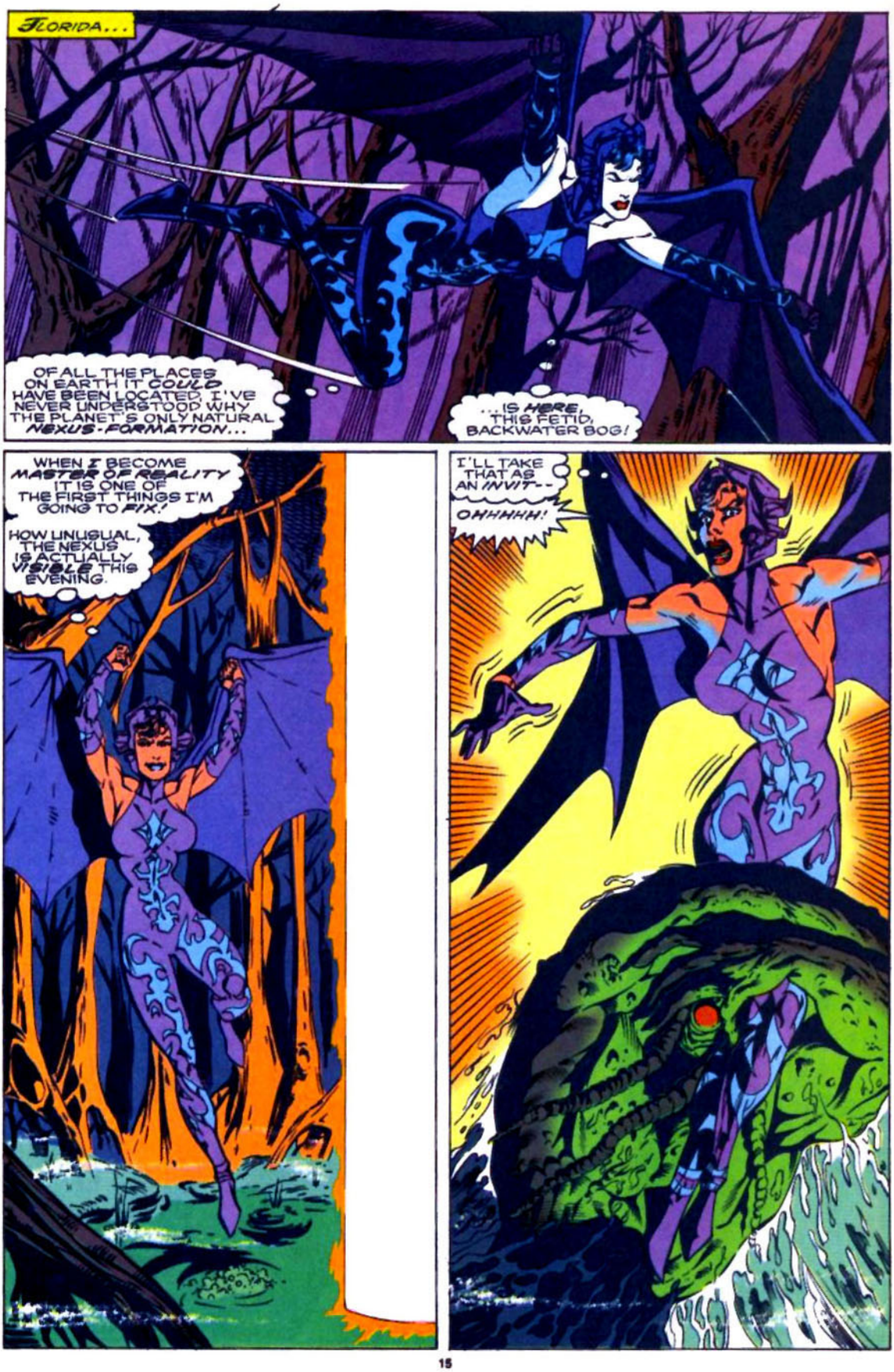
MEANWHILE, AT A HOSPITAL SOMEWHERE IN WISCONSIN...
DON'T SPARE ME, DOCTOR. WHAT'S THE VERDICT?
WELL, MRS. VAUGHN, WE GOT ALL OF IT, AND WITH A LITTLE CHEMO, THE CHANCES ARE GOOD THERE'LL BE NO RECURRENCE.
THAT'S WONDERFUL.
WAY TO GO, MOM!
IF YOU'D LIKE TO SPEND A LITTLE MORE TIME WITH YOUR SON, WE CAN DISCUSS POSSIBLE RECONSTRUCTION A LITTLE LATER.
AW, MOM, I'M SO HAPPY YOU'RE GOING TO BE OKAY.
TAKE MORE THAN A LITTLE CANCER TO KNOCK OUT THIS OLD BIRD.
YOU'RE NOT OLD, MOM.
YOU'RE SWEET, BUT NOW, SON, YOU OUGHT TO GO.
YOU SHOULD BE OUT SAVING THE UNIVERSE AND YOU KNOW IT! I'LL BE OKAY. YOUR SISTER WILL BE HERE TO LOOK AFTER ME SOON.
YOU SURE THERE'S NOTHING ELSE I CAN DO FOR YOU?
OKAY. ONE THING--
--SHOW ME HOW YOU LOOK IN YOUR QUASAR COSTUME.
HA. ALL RIGHT.

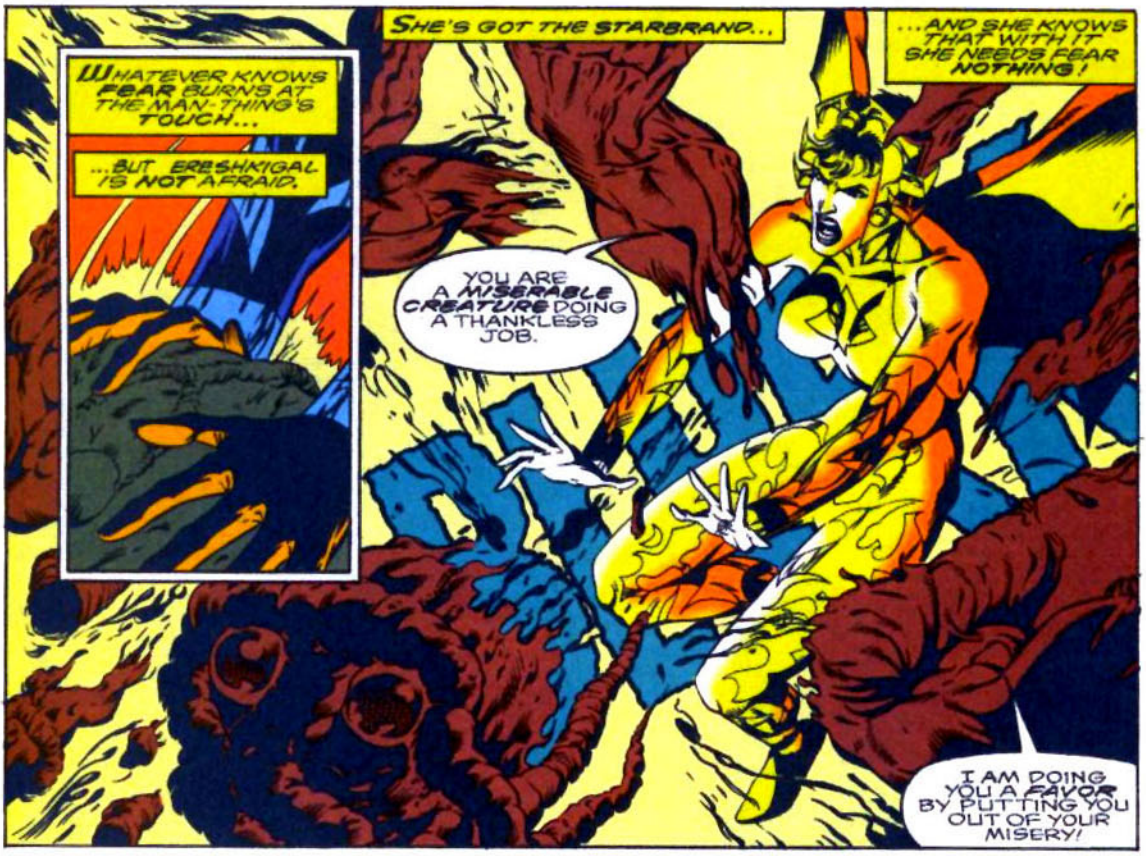
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
STILL LIKE MY OLD ONE BETTER?
THIS ONE'S GROWING ON ME.
LOVE YOU, MOM.
BYE!
AND SOON...
SO I JUST WANTED TO APOLOGIZE TO YOU, EPOCH, FOR ACTING SO STRANGE YESTERDAY.*
I WAS JUST VERY STRESSED OUT, WHAT WITH MY MOTHER'S CANCER AND ALL...
I UNDERSTAND. MANY ENTITIES I'VE MET HAVE STRONG EMOTIONS ABOUT CERTAIN OTHER ENTITIES, AND THOSE EMOTIONS OFTEN CLOUD REASONING.
UH... RIGHT. ANYWAY, REMEMBER I ASKED YOU ABOUT MY FRIEND, KAYLA...
SHE IS IN THE CITY YOU CALL NEW YORK.
YOU'RE KIDDING. I THOUGHT SHE'D-- THAT'S GREAT!
TALK TO YOU LATER!
*IN THE LAST ISSUE.--MIKE


SOON...
NOT SURE WHERE TO TRY FIRST.
HATE TO HAVE THE DOOR SLAMMED IN MY FACE AGAIN AT HER DAD'S HOUSE...
...GUESS I'LL TRY THE OFFICE FIRST ON THE OFF CHANCE SHE CHECKED IN.
11 MINUTES LATER...
KAYLA?
MR. VAUGHN?
AND THEN SHE--
VAUGHN?
WENDELL!
I'M SO HAPPY TO SEE YOU!
YOU ARE? I MEAN--
I'M HAPPY TO SEE YOU, TOO, KAY!
HMH.
SOME REAL BAD THINGS HAVE HAPPENED TO ME, WENDELL. HOLLY--H.D.--TURNED OUT TO BE SOME KIND OF SUPER-WEIRDO AND I THINK KISMET IS--
HOLD ON! LET'S GO INTO MY OFF--UH, KEN'S OFFICE.
GO AHEAD, VAUGHN.


AND...
...SO HOLLY IS SOME KIND OF COSTUMED VILLAIN--SHE CALLED HERSELF BRESH-SOMETHING--AND SHE TOOK MY POWER BECAUSE I DIDN'T WANT IT AFTER I ACCIDENTALLY HURT--MAYBE EVEN KILLED--THAT KISMET WOMAN AND--
WHOA, WHOA, WHOA, SLOW DOWN.
START WITH THE PART ABOUT YOUR POWER?
OH, I SOMEHOW GOT THIS TATTOO ON THE BACK OF MY NECK THAT GAVE ME THIS--
TATTOO--!?
DOES IT... LOOK LIKE THIS?
WHY, YES! IT DID. BUT I DON'T--
OH, MAN! WHAT A JERK I AM!
YOU? WHY?
I'M THE ONE WHO GAVE IT TO YOU! BY ACCIDENT!
"REMEMBER THAT TIME I CAME BACK FROM THAT WEIRD DIMENSION AND I WAS SO HAPPY TO BE BACK I HUGGED YOU AND KEN?"
WELL, I THOUGHT THAT THE STARBRAND HAD BURNED ITSELF OUT GETTING ME BACK HOME--
--BUT APPARENTLY IT HADN'T. IT WAS HIDING UNDER MY QUANTUM-BANDS, AND UPON CONTACT WITH YOU, I MUST HAVE TRANSFERRED IT TO THE BACK OF YOUR NECK.
I'M REALLY SORRY! I DIDN'T MEAN FOR THAT TO HAPPEN. SOUNDS LIKE YOU WENT THROUGH HECK BECAUSE OF IT!
YEAH. BUT AT LEAST I'M ALIVE! WHICH IS MORE THAN I CAN SAY FOR KISMET!
SHE ATTACKED ME... I WON... SHE'S IN THE EAST RIVER.
LET'S CHECK IT OUT.
LATER, KEN!

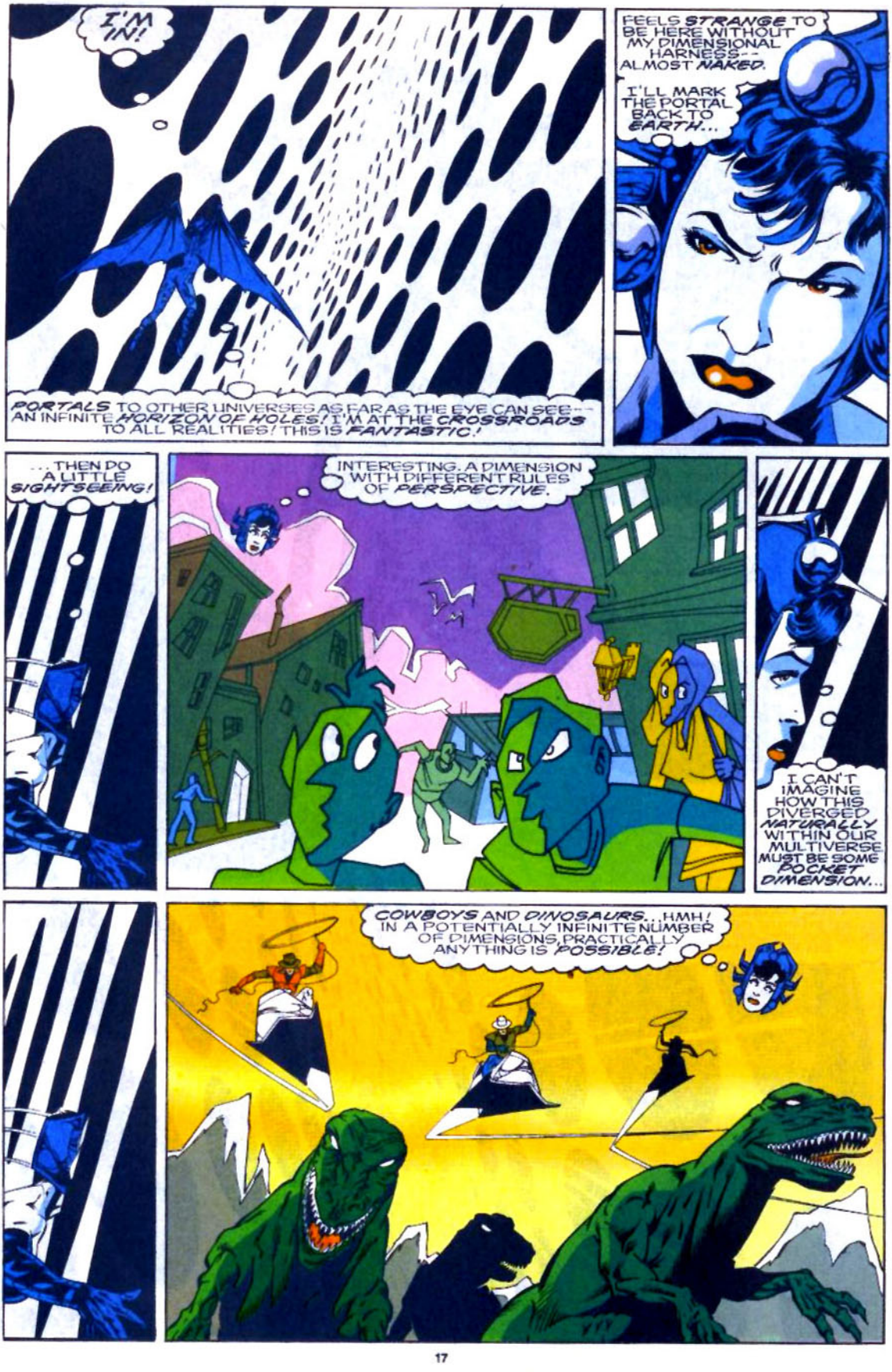
AND...
HER ENERGY SIGNATURE... INSIDE THIS WEIRD COCOON!
ALTERED BUT ALIVE... I THINK.
MUST BE SOME KIND OF HEALING THING SHE DOES!
DON'T HAVE TIME TO FIDDLE WITH IT RIGHT NOW.
NOT WITH KAYLA'S SUPPOSED FRIEND ON THE LOOSE WITH THE STARBRAND.
DID YOU FIND HER? IS SHE--?
YEAH, I FOUND HER. SHE'S IN SOME SORT OF PROTECTIVE COCOON OR SOMETHING. YOU CAN RELAX--YOU DIDN'T KILL HER.
YOU'RE JUST GOING TO LEAVE HER THERE?!?
FOR THE TIME BEING, SHE SHOULD BE AS SAFE THERE AS ANYWHERE.
RIGHT NOW I'M MORE CONCERNED WITH THIS HOLLY OR BRESH PERSON. FROM WHAT YOU SAID, SHE COULD BE DANGEROUS.
I CAN HELP YOU FIND HER IF YOU TAKE ME WITH YOU.
I'M NOT SURE THAT WOULD BE SUCH A GOOD IDEA. I DON'T WANT YOU TO GET HURT...!
BUT I MAY BE ABLE TO TALK SOME SENSE INTO HER. I'M STILL HER FRIEND. SHE CAN'T BE AS EVIL AS SHE MAY SEEM.
I JUST FEEL YOU'VE GONE THROUGH SO MUCH ALREADY BECAUSE OF ME--!
HOLLY SAID SHE'D BE ANGRY IF I BETRAYED HER. YOU'VE GOT TO GIVE ME THE CHANCE TO EXPLAIN TO HER THAT I HAVEN'T.

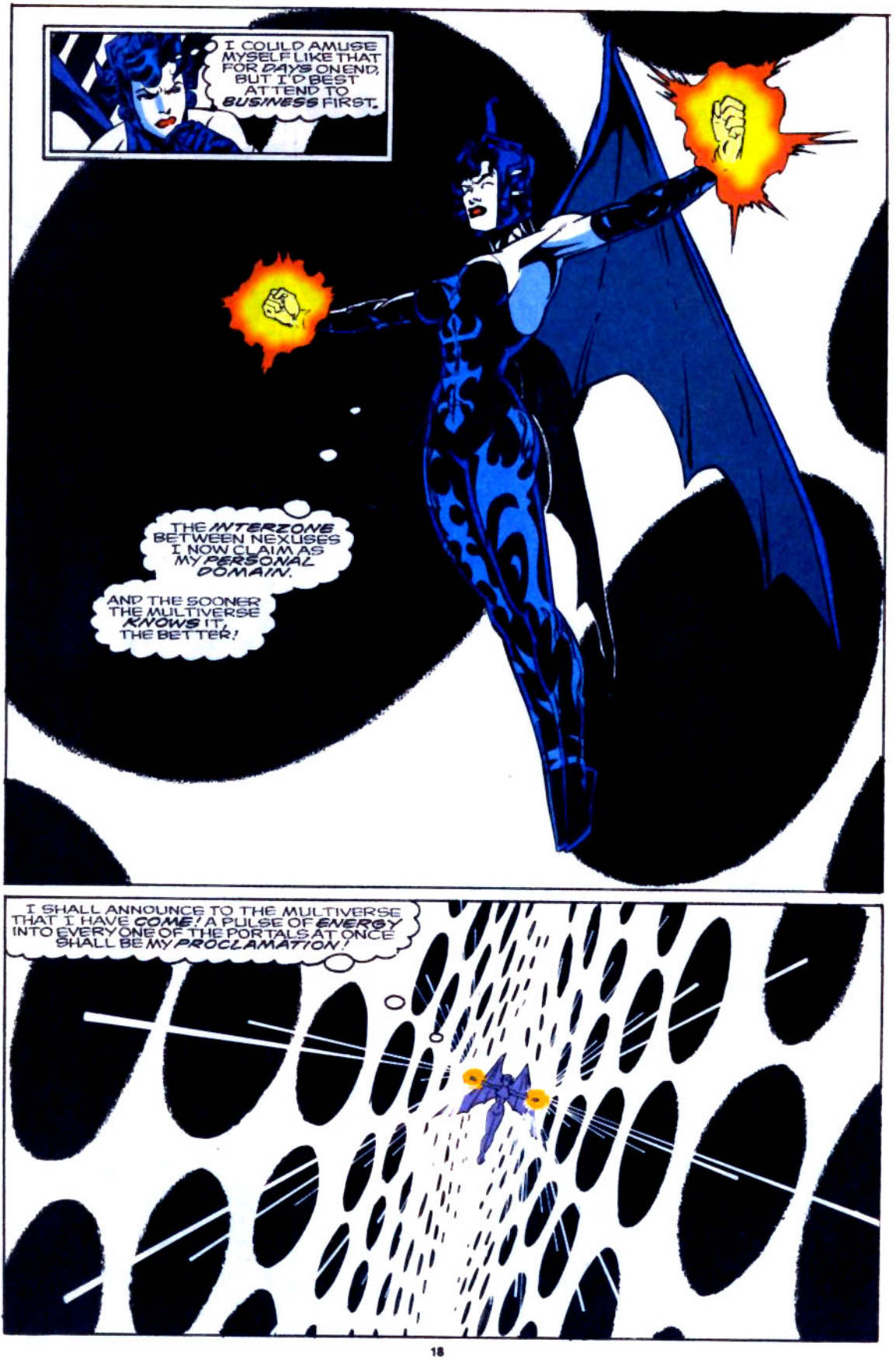

FLORIDA...
OF ALL THE PLACES ON EARTH IT COULD HAVE BEEN LOCATED, I'VE NEVER UNDERSTOOD WHY THE PLANET'S ONLY NATURAL NEXUS-FORMATION...
...IS HERE, THIS FETID, BACKWATER BOG!
WHEN I BECOME MASTER OF REALITY IT IS ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS I'M GOING TO FIX!
HOW UNUSUAL, THE NEXUS IS ACTUALLY VISIBLE THIS EVENING.
I'LL TAKE THAT AS AN INVIT--
OHHHHH!


WHATEVER KNOWS FEAR BURNS AT THE MAN-THING'S TOUCH...
...BUT ERESHKIGAL IS NOT AFRAID.
SHE'S GOT THE STARBRAND...
...AND SHE KNOWS THAT WITH IT SHE NEEDS FEAR NOTHING!
YOU ARE A MISERABLE CREATURE DOING A THANKLESS JOB.
I AM DOING YOU A FAVOR BY PUTTING YOU OUT OF YOUR MISERY!

NOW... THE NEXUS, CURIOUS ANOMALY IN THE LOCAL FABRIC OF SPACE/TIME.
THOUGH I'VE LONG KNOWN OF NATURAL PHENOMENA LIKE THIS, I'VE NEVER MADE USE OF THEM BECAUSE THEY ARE SO HEAVILY GUARDED AND REGULATED.

I'VE BEEN OBLIGED TO EXPEND VAST AMOUNTS OF ENERGY CREATING MY OWN DIMENSIONAL APERTURES.
BUT AFTER TODAY THAT WILL CHANGE... AND THE MOST EXTENSIVE CROSS-TIME TRANSIT SYSTEM WILL BE AT MY DISPOSAL.


I'M IN!
PORTALS TO OTHER UNIVERSES AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE--AN INFINITE HORIZON OF HOLES! I'M AT THE CROSSROADS TO ALL REALITIES! THIS IS FANTASTIC!
FEELS STRANGE TO BE HERE WITHOUT MY DIMENSIONAL HARNESS--ALMOST NAKED.
I'LL MARK THE PORTAL BACK TO EARTH...
...THEN DO A LITTLE SIGHTSEEING!
INTERESTING. A DIMENSION WITH DIFFERENT RULES OF PERSPECTIVE.
I CAN'T IMAGINE HOW THIS DIVERGED NATURALLY WITHIN OUR MULTIVERSE MUST BE SOME POCKET DIMENSION...
COWBOYS AND DINOSAURS...HMH! IN A POTENTIALLY INFINITE NUMBER OF DIMENSIONS, PRACTICALLY ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE!


I COULD AMUSE MYSELF LIKE THAT FOR DAYS ON END, BUT I'D BEST ATTEND TO BUSINESS FIRST.
THE INTERZONE BETWEEN NEXUSES I NOW CLAIM AS MY PERSONAL DOMAIN.
AND THE SOONER THE MULTIVERSE KNOWS IT, THE BETTER!
I SHALL ANNOUNCE TO THE MULTIVERSE THAT I HAVE COME! A PULSE OF ENERGY INTO EVERY ONE OF THE PORTALS AT ONCE SHALL BE MY PROCLAMATION!

THERE. NOW TO WAIT AND SEE WHO COMES *SCURRYING* OUT OF THEIR LITTLE HIDEY-HOLES TO *INVESTIGATE* ME.

NO MATTER *WHO* OR *HOW MANY*, I KNOW THAT THANKS TO THE STARBRAND I SHALL PROVE *SUPERIOR* TO THEM ALL!

MEANWHILE, ELSEWHERE IN THE GALAXY, A ***GLEAMING FIGURE*** *ON AN UNLIKELY CONVEYANCE ABRUPTLY ALTERS HIS COURSE...*

THE FIGURE--THE FORMER HERALD TO THE LEGENDARY ***GALACTUS,*** *IS NOW THE SELF-APPOINTED* ***SENTINEL OF THE STARLANES*** *AND ONE OF THE MOST RECOGNIZED ENTITIES IN ALL THE UNIVERSE...*

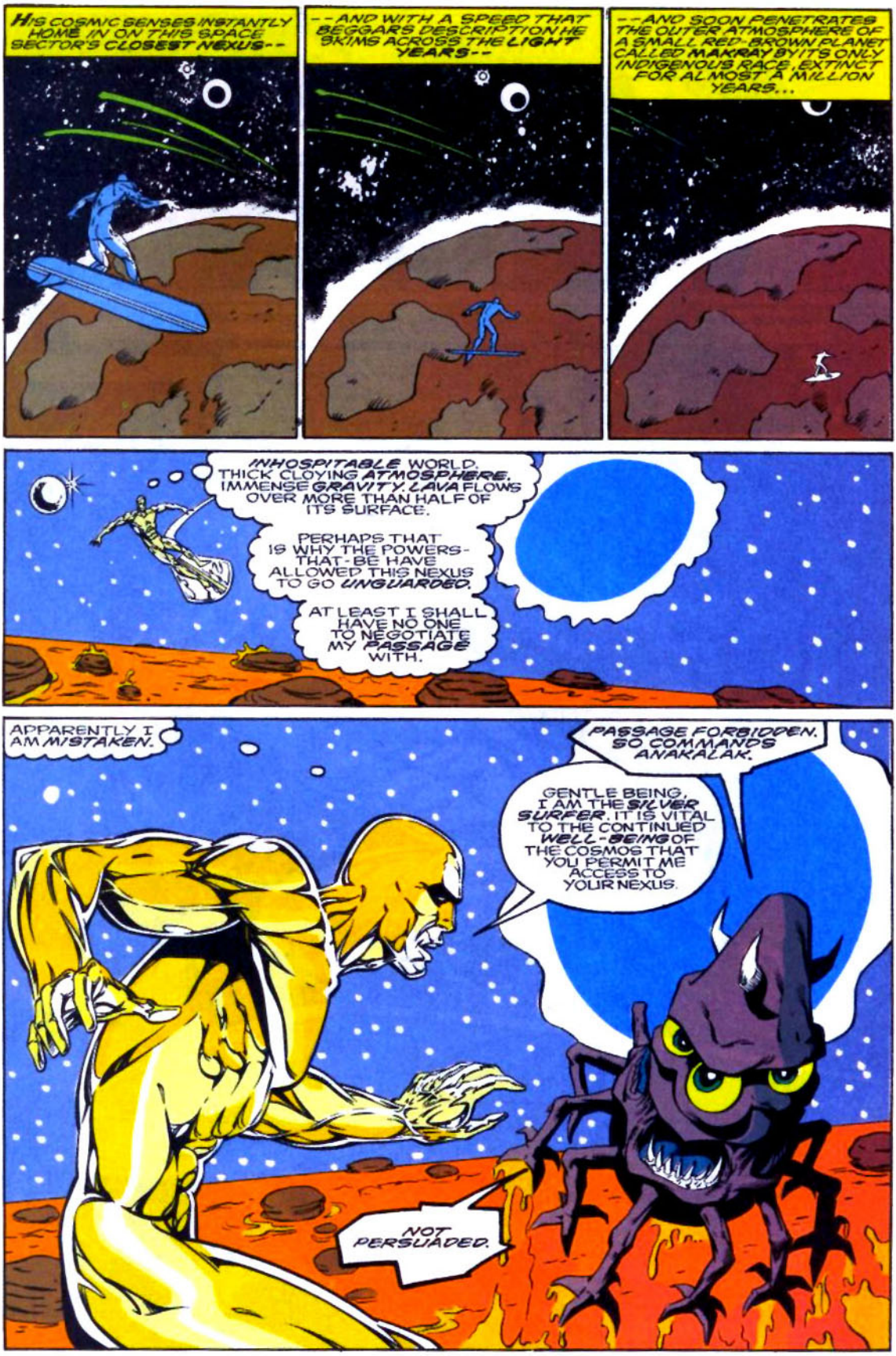
HE IS...

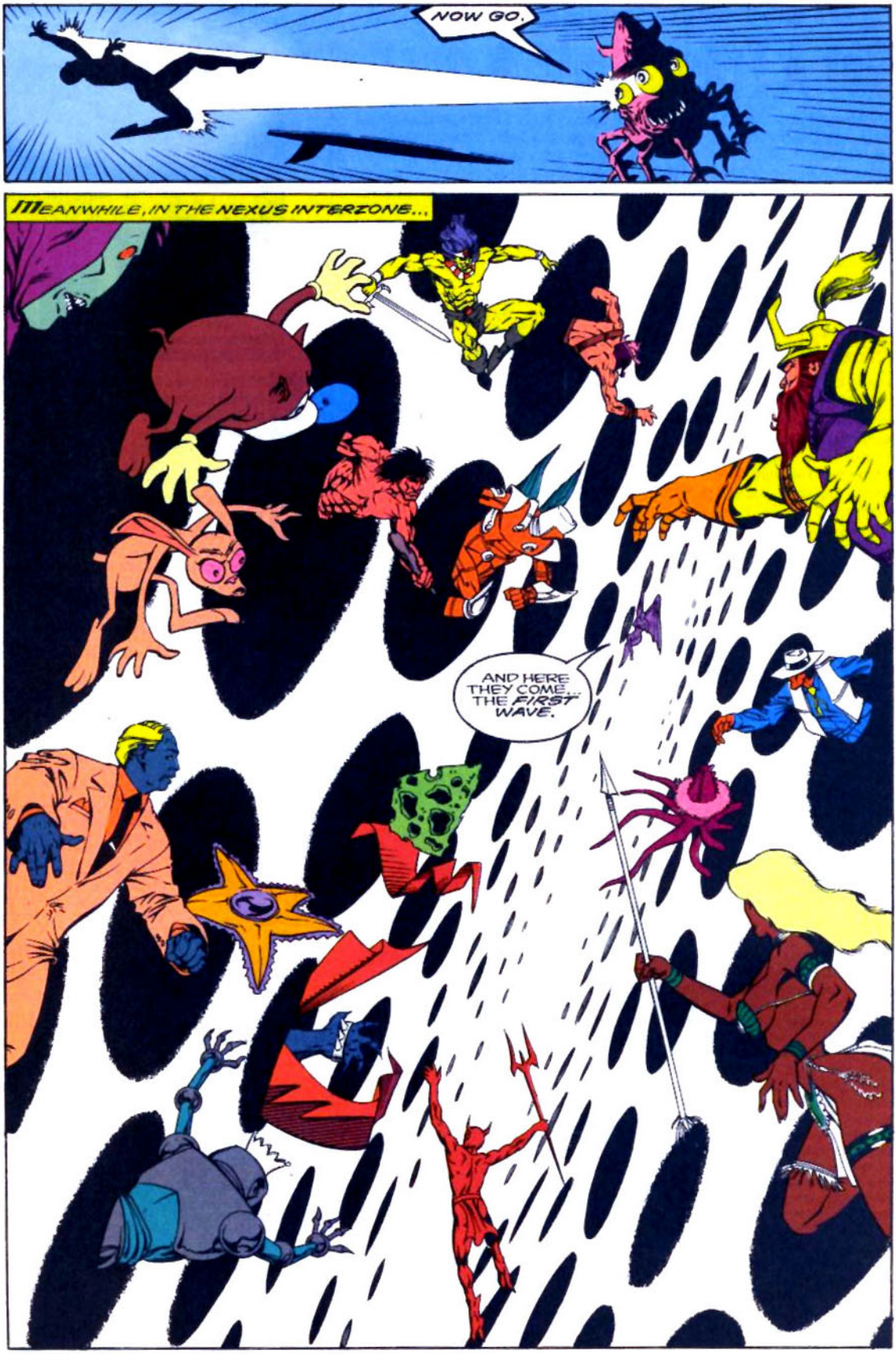
THE SILVER SURFER

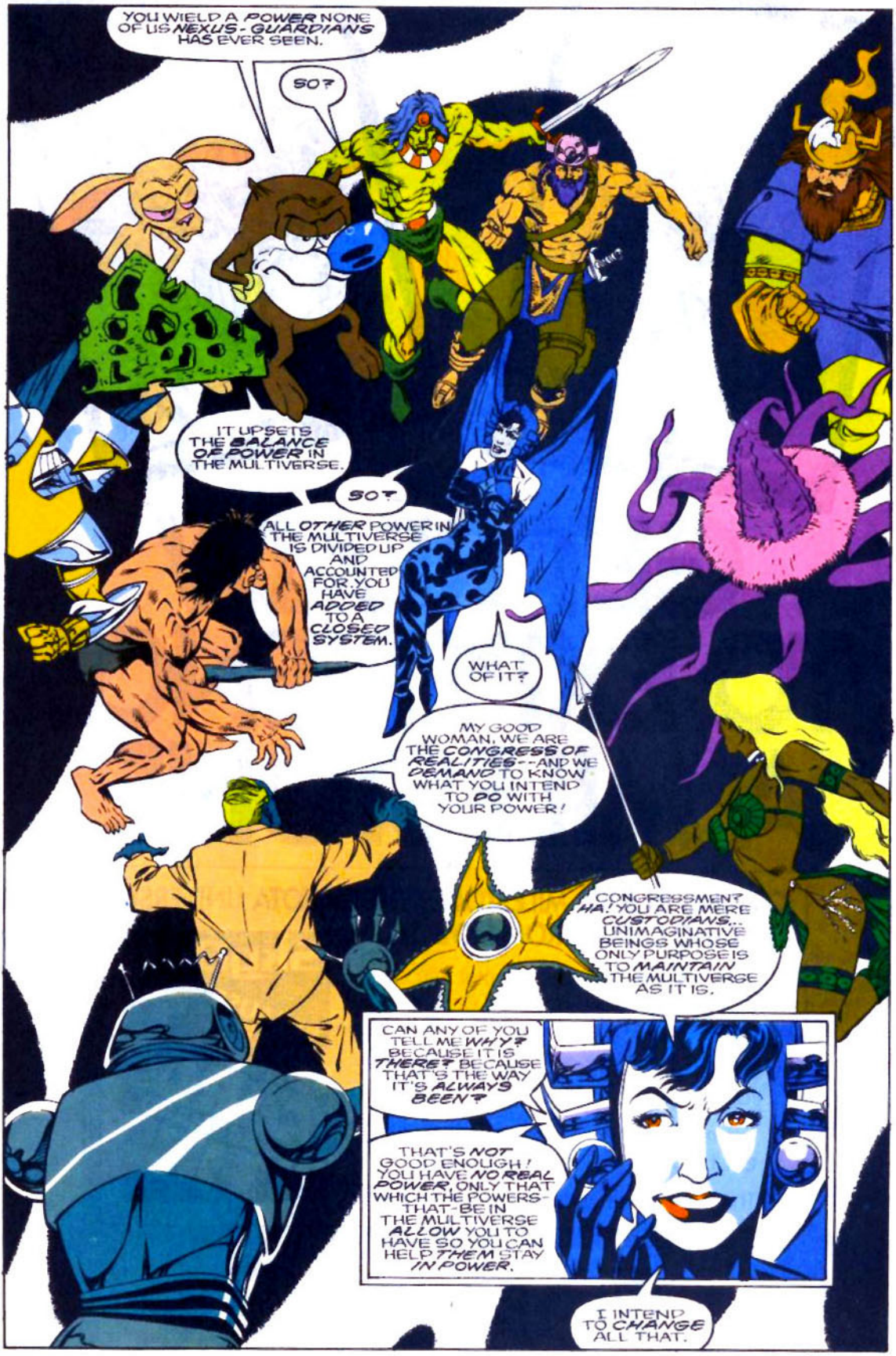
I SENSE SOMETHING *AMISS*... SOME SUBTLE SHIFT IN THE ALIGNMENT OF THE VERY *COSMIC AXIS*...!

THIS COULD HAVE *SEVERE REPERCUSSIONS* THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE MILKY WAY GALAXY...

I SHALL *INVESTIGATE*...!

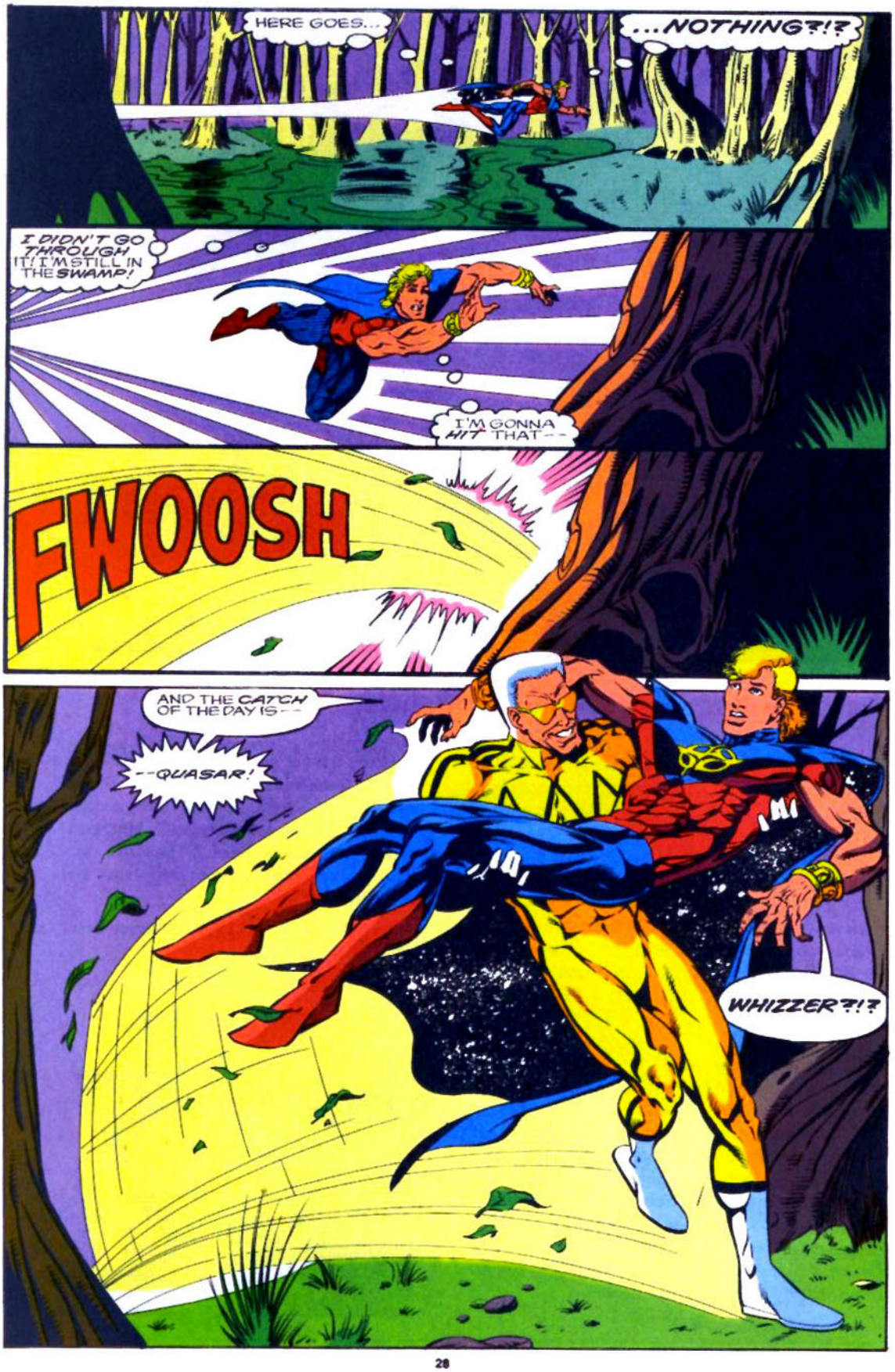

HIS COSMIC SENSES INSTANTLY HOME IN ON THIS SPACE SECTOR'S CLOSEST NEXUS--
--AND WITH A SPEED THAT BEGGARS DESCRIPTION HE SKIMS ACROSS THE LIGHT YEARS--
--AND SOON PENETRATES THE OUTER ATMOSPHERE OF A SMALL RED-BROWN PLANET CALLED MAKRAY BY ITS ONLY INDIGENOUS RACE, EXTINCT FOR ALMOST A MILLION YEARS...
INHOSPITABLE WORLD. THICK CLOYING ATMOSPHERE. IMMENSE GRAVITY. LAVA FLOWS OVER MORE THAN HALF OF ITS SURFACE.
PERHAPS THAT IS WHY THE POWERS-THAT-BE HAVE ALLOWED THIS NEXUS TO GO UNGUARDED.
AT LEAST I SHALL HAVE NO ONE TO NEGOTIATE MY PASSAGE WITH.
APPARENTLY I AM MISTAKEN.
PASSAGE FORBIDDEN. SO COMMANDS ANAKALAK.
GENTLE BEING, I AM THE SILVER SURFER. IT IS VITAL TO THE CONTINUED WELL-BEING OF THE COSMOS THAT YOU PERMIT ME ACCESS TO YOUR NEXUS.
NOT PERSUADED.


NOW GO.
MEANWHILE, IN THE NEXUS INTERZONE...
AND HERE THEY COME... THE FIRST WAVE.

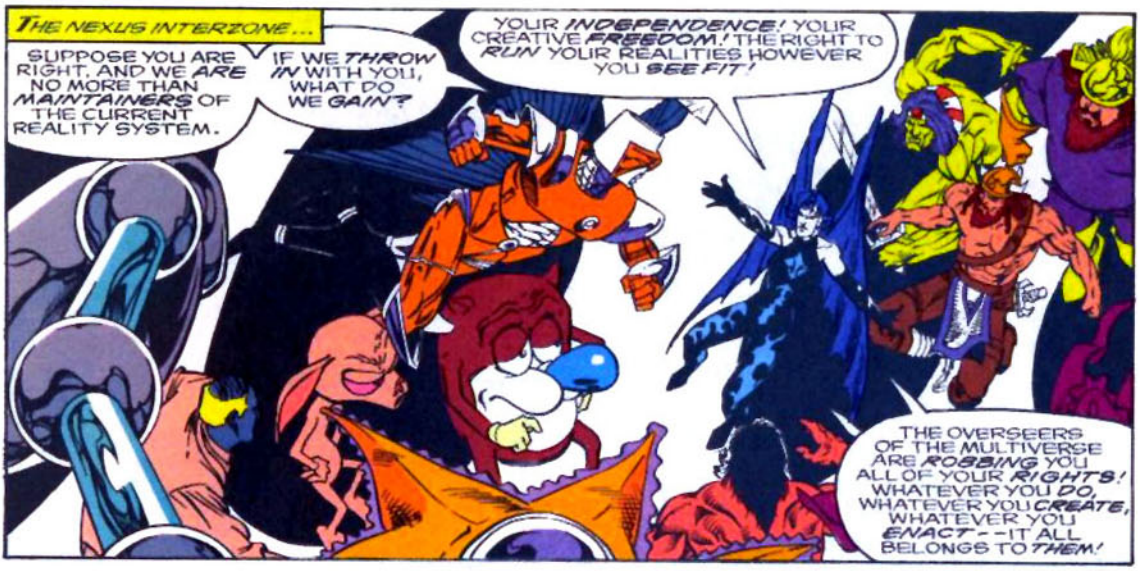

YOU WIELD A POWER NONE OF US NEXUS-GUARDIANS HAS EVER SEEN.
SO?
IT UPSETS THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE MULTIVERSE.
SO?
ALL OTHER POWER IN THE MULTIVERSE IS DIVIDED UP AND ACCOUNTED FOR. YOU HAVE ADDED TO A CLOSED SYSTEM.
WHAT OF IT?
MY GOOD WOMAN, WE ARE THE CONGRESS OF REALITIES--AND WE DEMAND TO KNOW WHAT YOU INTEND TO DO WITH YOUR POWER!
CONGRESSMEN? HA! YOU ARE MERE CUSTODIANS... UNIMAGINATIVE BEINGS WHOSE ONLY PURPOSE IS TO MAINTAIN THE MULTIVERSE AS IT IS.
CAN ANY OF YOU TELL ME WHY? BECAUSE IT IS THERE? BECAUSE THAT'S THE WAY IT'S ALWAYS BEEN?
THAT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH! YOU HAVE NO REAL POWER, ONLY THAT WHICH THE POWERS-THAT-BE IN THE MULTIVERSE ALLOW YOU TO HAVE SO YOU CAN HELP THEM STAY IN POWER.
I INTEND TO CHANGE ALL THAT.

THE EVERGLADES...
HERE? THIS IS WHERE SHE WENT?
I'M NOT SURE...IT FEELS LIKE IT.
WENDELL? AM I ALWAYS GOING TO HAVE A PIECE OF THIS STARBRAND LEFT IN ME?
DON'T KNOW. I HAD A FRACTION OF IT MYSELF TILL I TOTALLY TAPPED IT OUT.
HEY, I JUST REALIZED WHERE WE ARE! IT ALL MAKES SENSE!
THIS IS WHERE THE NEXUS OF REALITIES IS! I CAME THROUGH HERE MYSELF WHEN I FIRST BROUGHT THE STARBRAND TO THIS UNIVERSE!*
IS THAT YOUR FRIEND?
I DON'T THINK SO, UNLESS SHE DYED HER HAIR BLONDE.
*ISSUE #31.
EXCUSE ME, MISS.
QUASAR.
YOU KNOW ME? I DON'T--WAIT. YOUR HAIR'S DIFFERENT, BUT WE MET ONCE, DIDN'T WE?* YOUR NAME'S JENNIFER KALE!
*IN MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #29.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
I'M TRYING TO PIECE TOGETHER THE MAN-THING!

WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?
I DON'T KNOW!
I'VE GOT A HUNCH I DO.
OH. KAYLA, THIS IS JENNIFER, JENNIFER KALE.
HI.
WE'RE HERE IN PURSUIT OF A WOMAN WHO'S JUST ACQUIRED IMMENSE POWER FROM OUTSIDE THIS MULTIVERSE.
MY GUESS IS THAT SHE TRIED TO GO THROUGH THE NEXUS, THE MAN-THING TRIED TO STOP HER, AND... SHE DID WHAT SHE DID TO HIM.
IS THIS AN OLD GIRLFRIEND OF HIS OR WHAT?
THE NEXUS IS NOT ALWAYS THIS VISIBLE. IT'S A BAD OMEN.
WELL, I'M GOING TO GO THROUGH THE NEXUS TO SEE IF I CAN FIND HER.
BUT WHY? IF SHE'S GONE INTO ANOTHER REALITY, LET HER STAY THERE!
SHE MAY STILL USE THE POWER IN A WAY THAT WILL AFFECT OUR UNIVERSE.
KAYLA, YOU'D BETTER STAY HERE WITH JENNIFER.
BUT--!
WHILE MY PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY IS TO PROTECT THIS UNIVERSE, IT'S MY FAULT THAT THE STARBRAND IS LOOSE IN THIS MULTIVERSE.
I CAN'T REST UNTIL THAT INFERNAL BRAND HAS BEEN EXPUNGED FROM THIS SYSTEM OF UNIVERSES!


HERE GOES...
...NOTHING?!?
I DIDN'T GO THROUGH IT! I'M STILL IN THE SWAMP!
I'M GONNA HIT THAT--
FWOOSH
AND THE CATCH OF THE DAY IS--
--QUASAR!
WHIZZER?!?

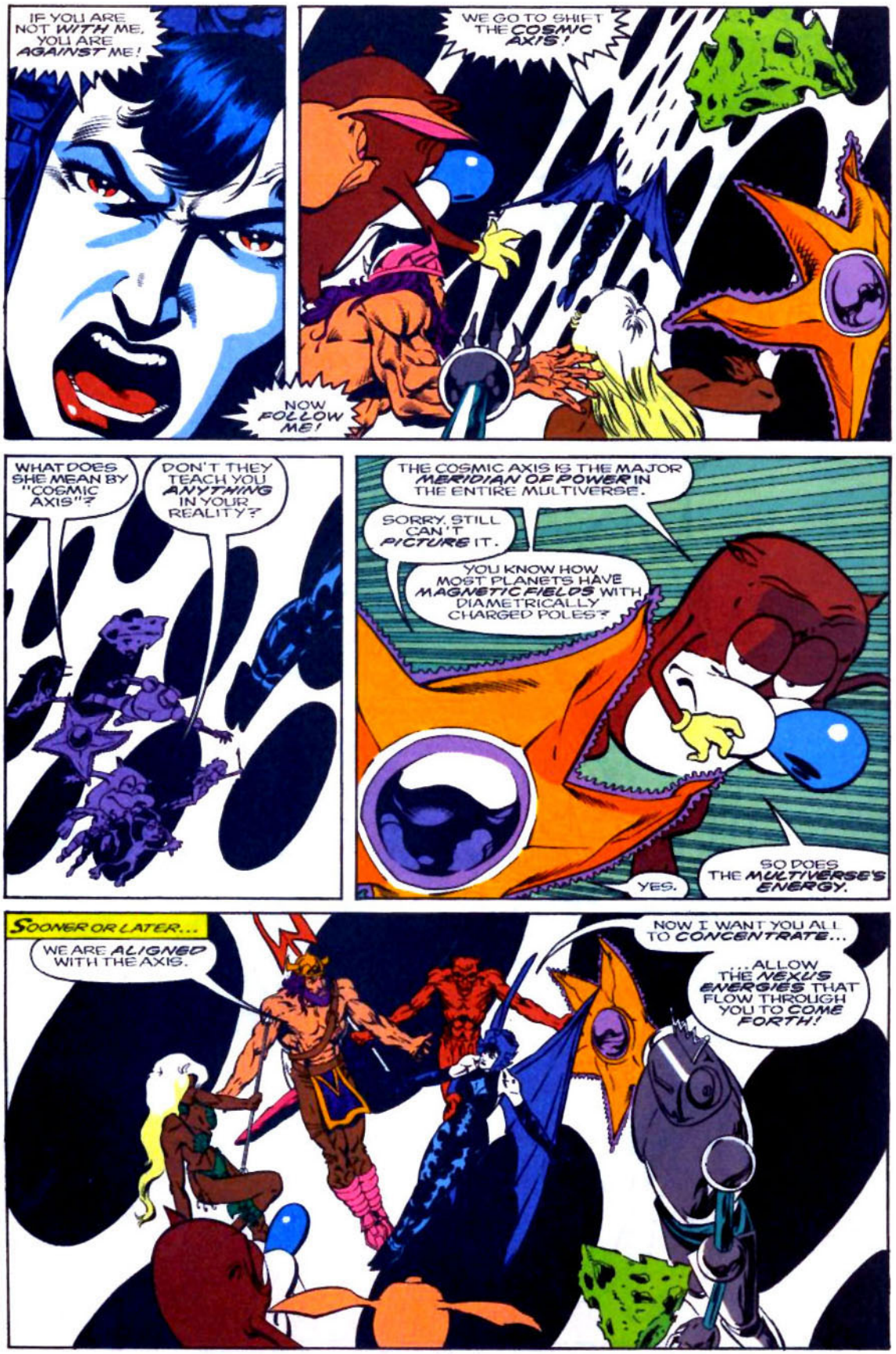
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, GUY?
MOONGLOW SENT ME. SHE SENSES SOMETHING BIG WAS GOING ON DOWN HERE. I TAKE IT SOMETHING IS?
IT LOOKS THAT WAY, BUT SO FAR I CAN'T TELL WHAT.
ALL I KNOW IS THAT I HAVE TO GET INSIDE THAT THING.
WHAT THING?
THAT INTERDIMENSIONAL NEXUS THAT JUST DID A FADE-OUT AS I WAS ABOUT TO GO INTO IT.
OH.
COME ON, I GOT TO GO TALK TO SOMEONE.
AND, ACROSS THE SWAMP...
PLEASED TO MEET YOU, LADIES.
JENNIFER, YOU'RE FROM AROUND HERE. ANY IDEA HOW TO REOPEN THE NEXUS ONCE IT'S VANISHED?
NOT REALLY. THE NEXUS IS LIKE AN IRREGULAR GEYSER. IT FLARES UP AND FADES OUT RANDOMLY AND I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO DETECT ANY PATTERN.
IF ONLY I COULD BRING THE MAN-THING BACK TO LIFE... MAYBE HE COULD SHOW US...!

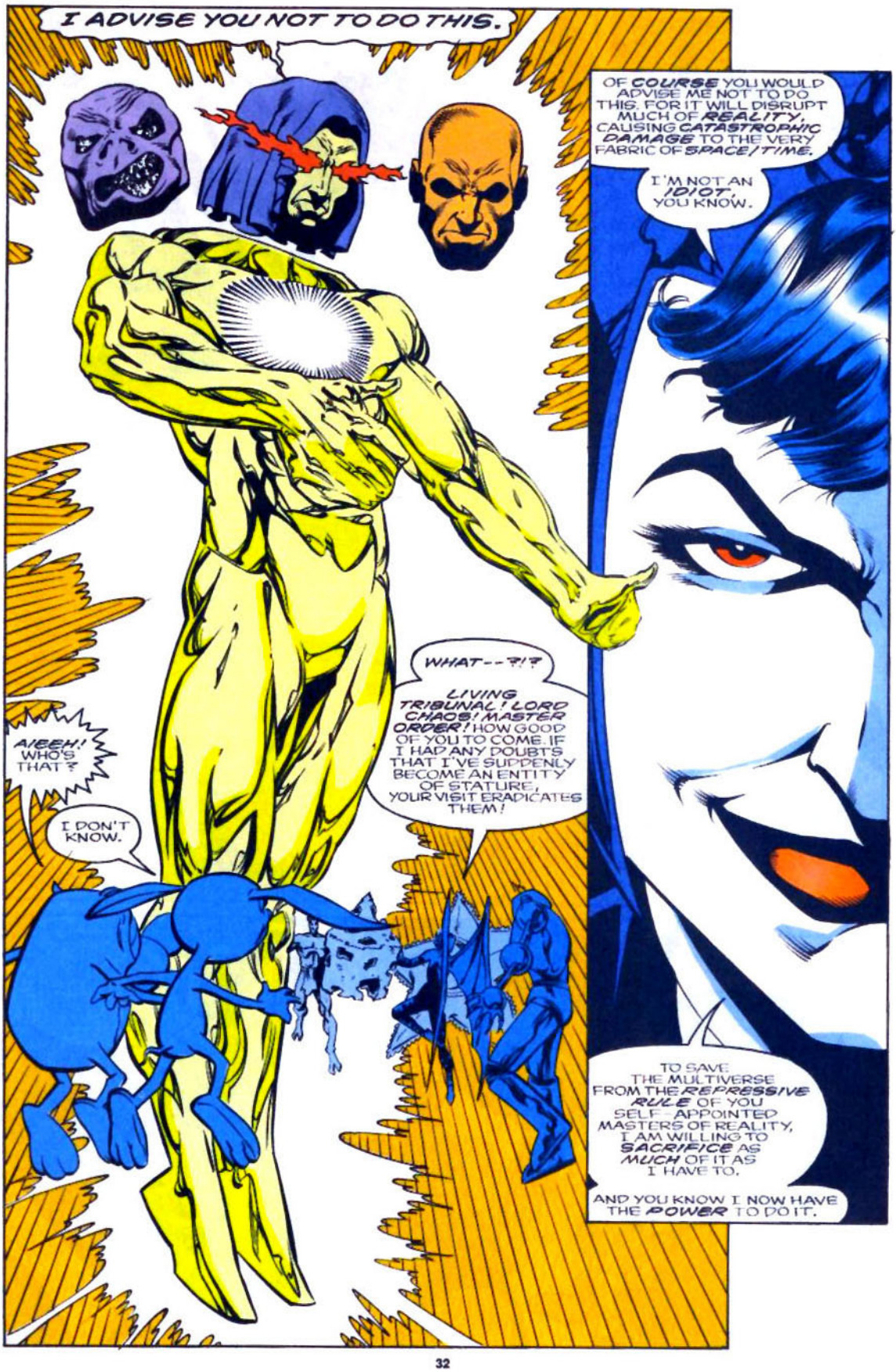

THE NEXUS INTERZONE...
SUPPOSE YOU ARE RIGHT, AND WE ARE NO MORE THAN MAINTAINERS OF THE CURRENT REALITY SYSTEM.
IF WE THROW IN WITH YOU, WHAT DO WE GAIN?
YOUR INDEPENDENCE! YOUR CREATIVE FREEDOM! THE RIGHT TO RUN YOUR REALITIES HOWEVER YOU SEE FIT!
THE OVERSEERS OF THE MULTIVERSE ARE ROBBING YOU ALL OF YOUR RIGHTS! WHATEVER YOU DO, WHATEVER YOU CREATE, WHATEVER YOU ENACT--IT ALL BELONGS TO THEM!

I WILL CHANGE THE VERY SYSTEM BY WHICH THIS MULTIVERSE IS RUN. NO MORE CENTRAL AUTHORITY. I WILL GRANT YOU THE FREEDOM TO MAKE YOUR REALITIES UNIQUE, INDEPENDENT, AND EMPLOYEE-OWNED AND OPERATED!

ALL THOSE OF YOU WHO WISH TO JOIN ME IN CREATING A SUBVERSIVE NEW ORDER, GET BEHIND ME!
THE REST OF YOU...

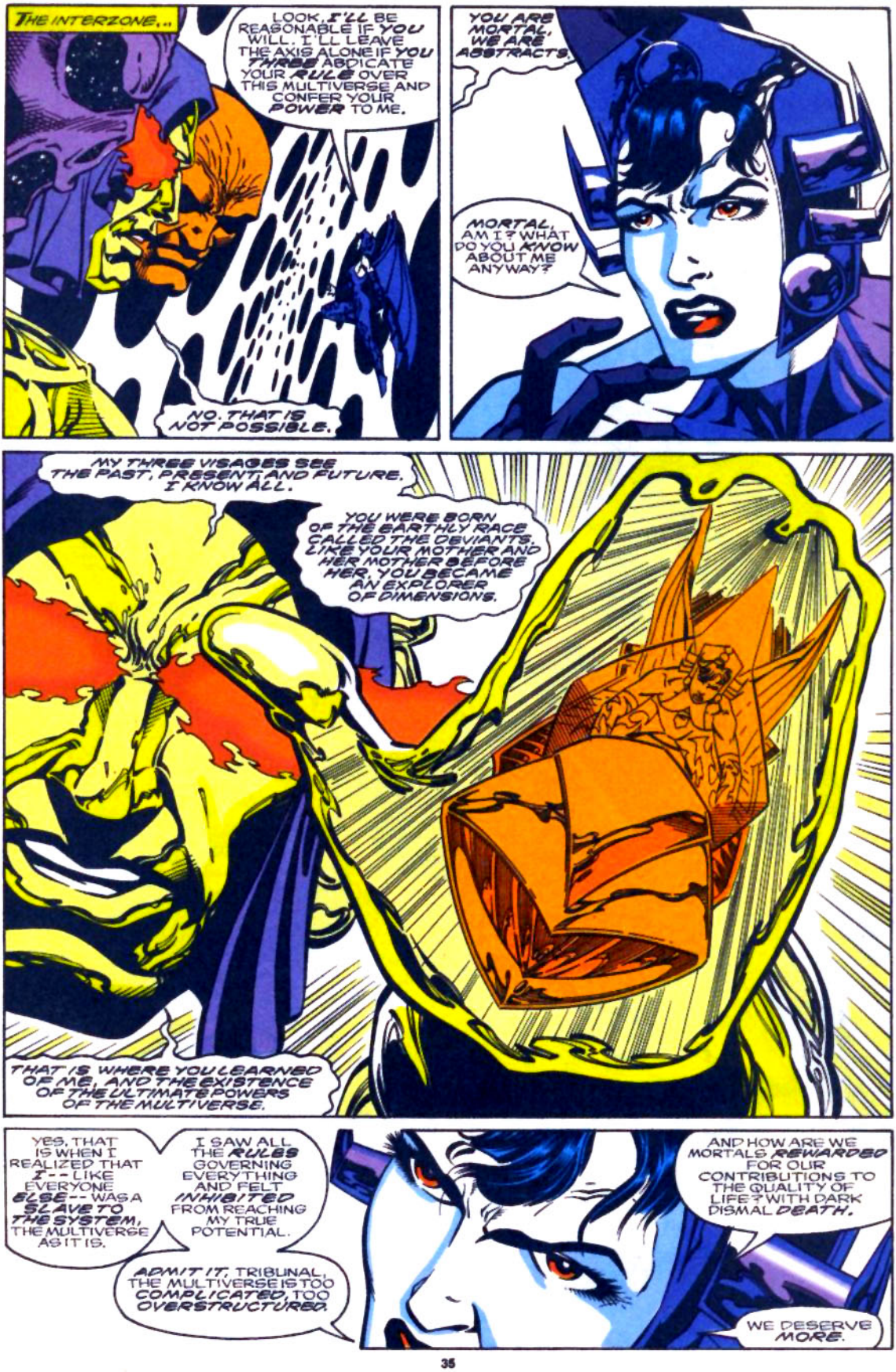
...MAY CEASE TO EXIST!


IF YOU ARE NOT WITH ME, YOU ARE AGAINST ME!
WE GO TO SHIFT THE COSMIC AXIS!
NOW FOLLOW ME!
WHAT DOES SHE MEAN BY "COSMIC AXIS"?
DON'T THEY TEACH YOU ANYTHING IN YOUR REALITY?
THE COSMIC AXIS IS THE MAJOR MERIDIAN OF POWER IN THE ENTIRE MULTIVERSE.
SORRY, STILL CAN'T PICTURE IT.
YOU KNOW HOW MOST PLANETS HAVE MAGNETIC FIELDS WITH DIAMETRICALLY CHARGED POLES?
YES.
SO DOES THE MULTIVERSE'S ENERGY.
SOONER OR LATER...
WE ARE ALIGNED WITH THE AXIS.
NOW I WANT YOU ALL TO CONCENTRATE...
...ALLOW THE NEXUS ENERGIES THAT FLOW THROUGH YOU TO COME FORTH!

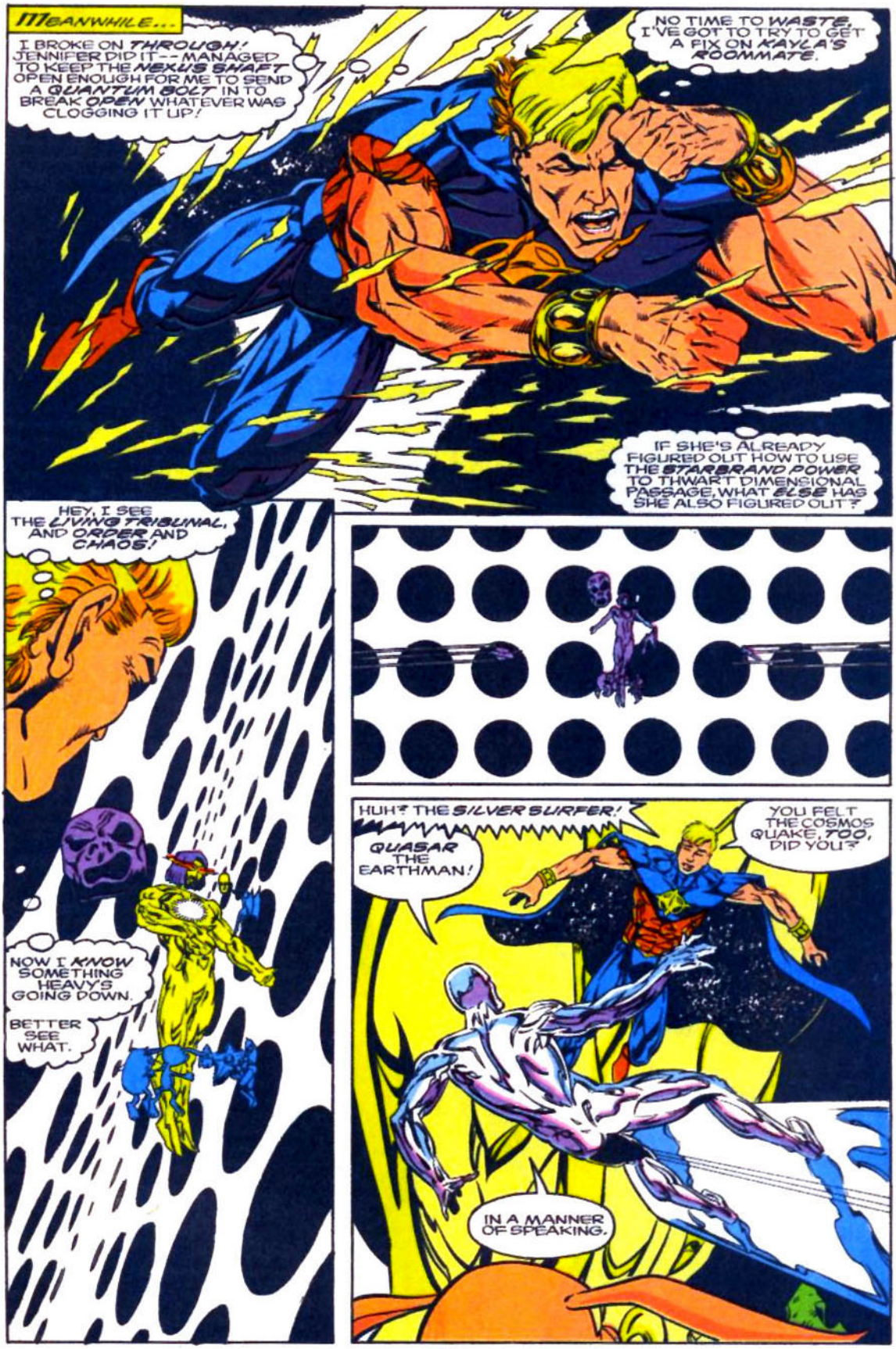

I ADVISE YOU NOT TO DO THIS.
OF COURSE YOU WOULD ADVISE ME NOT TO DO THIS. FOR IT WILL DISRUPT MUCH OF REALITY, CAUSING CATASTROPHIC DAMAGE TO THE VERY FABRIC OF SPACE/TIME.
I'M NOT AN IDIOT, YOU KNOW.
WHAT--?!?
LIVING TRIBUNAL! LORD CHAOS! MASTER ORDER! HOW GOOD OF YOU TO COME. IF I HAD ANY DOUBTS THAT I'VE SUDDENLY BECOME AN ENTITY OF STATURE, YOUR VISIT ERADICATES THEM!
AIEEH! WHO'S THAT?
I DON'T KNOW.
TO SAVE THE MULTIVERSE FROM THE REPRESSIVE RULE OF YOU SELF-APPOINTED MASTERS OF REALITY, I AM WILLING TO SACRIFICE AS MUCH OF IT AS I HAVE TO.
AND YOU KNOW I NOW HAVE THE POWER TO DO IT.

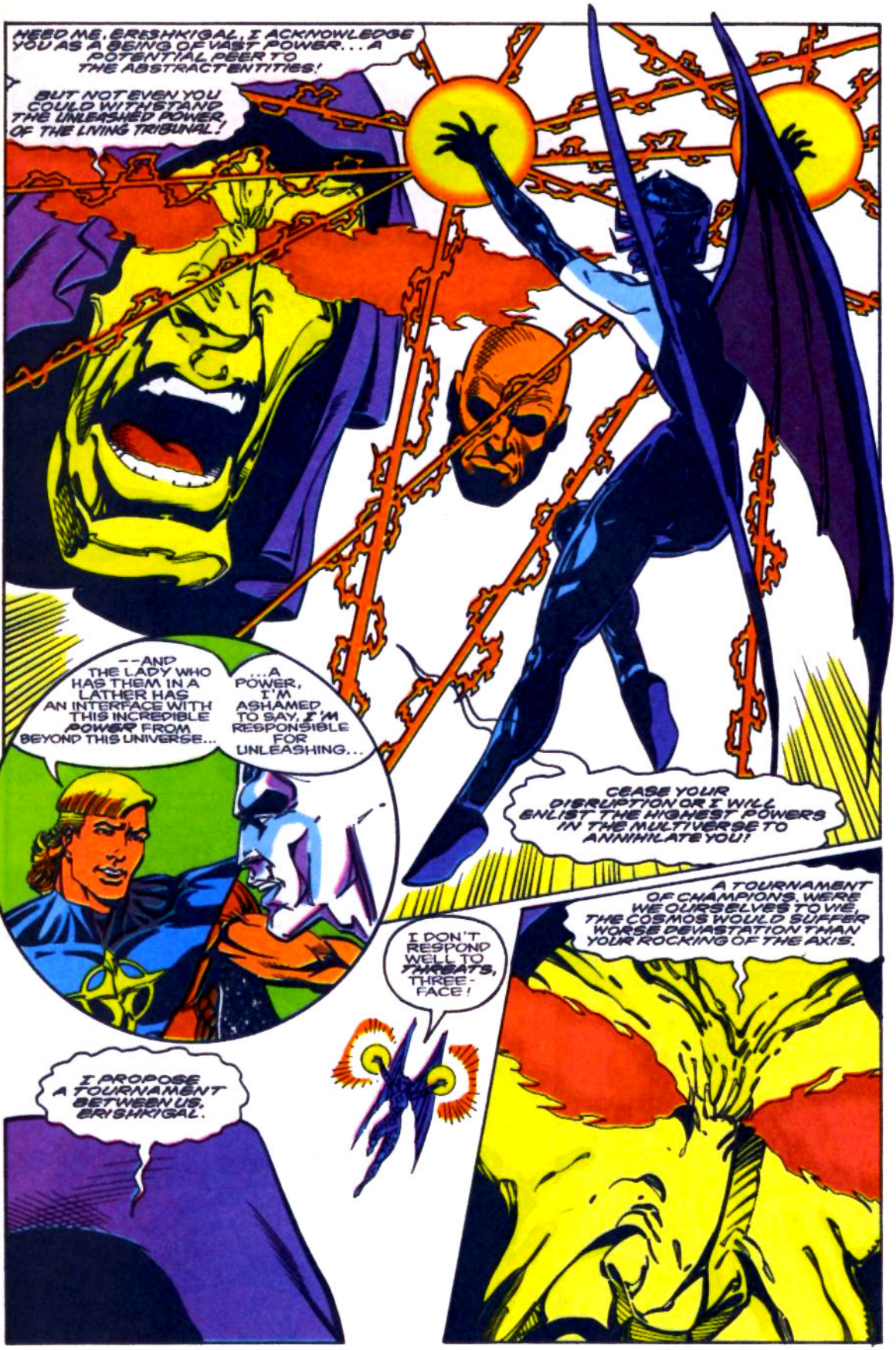
AT THAT MOMENT, ELSEWHERE ALONG THE SPACE/TIME CONTINUUM...
AT LAST! I HAVE THWARTED THAT OVERZEALOUS NEXUS GUARDIAN AND ACCESSED THE TRANSDIMENSIONAL REALM!
WHILE THE GUARDIAN SERVES A USEFUL AND NECESSARY FUNCTION, WHY SO MANY BEINGS ALLOW THEMSELVES TO BE BLINDED BY THE TRAPPINGS OF EPHEMERAL POWER IS UNFATHOMABLE TO ME.
NOW TO PINPOINT THE SOURCE OF THE COSMIC PERTURBATION!
EARTH...
HOW'S IT GOING?
IT'S WEIRD. SOON AS WE SET ONE OF HIS MUDDY PARTS NEXT TO ANOTHER, THEY JUST KIND OF ATTACH.
IT'S LIKE HE'S JUST MADE OF MUD AND VINES-- NO BONES OR BLOOD OR ANYTHING!
LOOKS LIKE I'M GOING TO HAVE TO MAKE THE RAFT BIGGER.

MINUTES LATER...
WELL, LOOKS LIKE MOST OF HIM IS THERE.
WHAT ARE THE HOPES OF REVIVING HIM, JENNIFER?
I'M NOT SURE. HIS FORM RESONATES WITH THE PECULIAR TONALITY OF THE NEXUS.
I'M TRYING TO USE MY HUMBLE MYSTICAL GIFTS TO AMPLIFY THOSE TONES.
ANYTHING I CAN DO?
NOT THAT I CAN THINK OF.
OH!
WHAT? WHAT'S HAPPENING?
IT'S A SLIVER OF THE NEXUS-- BURSTING OUT OF HIS CHEST!
IS THAT GOOD?


THE INTERZONE...
LOOK, I'LL BE REASONABLE IF YOU WILL. I'LL LEAVE THE AXIS ALONE IF YOU THREE ABDICATE YOUR RULE OVER THIS MULTIVERSE AND CONFER YOUR POWER TO ME.
NO. THAT IS NOT POSSIBLE.
YOU ARE MORTAL, WE ARE ABSTRACTS.
MORTAL, AM I? WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ME ANYWAY?
MY THREE VISAGES SEE THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE. I KNOW ALL.
YOU WERE BORN OF THE EARTHLY RACE CALLED THE OBVIANTS. LIKE YOUR MOTHER AND HER MOTHER BEFORE HER, YOU BECAME AN EXPLORER OF DIMENSIONS.
THAT IS WHERE YOU LEARNED OF ME, AND THE EXISTENCE OF THE ULTIMATE POWERS OF THE MULTIVERSE.
YES, THAT IS WHEN I REALIZED THAT I -- LIKE EVERYONE ELSE -- WAS A SLAVE TO THE SYSTEM, THE MULTIVERSE AS IT IS.
I SAW ALL THE RULES GOVERNING EVERYTHING AND FELT INHIBITED FROM REACHING MY TRUE POTENTIAL.
ADMIT IT, TRIBUNAL, THE MULTIVERSE IS TOO COMPLICATED, TOO OVERSTRUCTURED.
AND HOW ARE WE MORTALS REWARDED FOR OUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE QUALITY OF LIFE? WITH DARK DISMAL DEATH.
WE DESERVE MORE.

AND NOW AFTER CENTURIES OF SEARCHING FOR MEANINGFUL POWER, I HAVE FOUND SOMETHING THAT ENABLES ME TO BE A MAJOR PLAYER.
I HAVE POWER UNACCOUNTED FOR IN THIS MULTIVERSE. ITS VERY EXISTENCE UPSETS THE OLD BALANCE OF POWER. IT IS SOMETHING UNFORESEEN IN YOUR CLOSED SYSTEM.
AND WITH MY VAST WISDOM AND EXPERIENCE, I KNOW HOW TO USE THIS OUTSIDE POWER TO LIBERATE REALITY FROM YOUR TYRANNICAL CONTROL.
WATCH!
MORTAL, LOOK WHAT YOU ARE DOING!
YOU ARE CAUSING CHAOS TO GROW--AND ORDER TO DIMINISH!
GOOD.


MEANWHILE...
I BROKE ON THROUGH! JENNIFER DID IT--MANAGED TO KEEP THE NEXUS SHAFT OPEN ENOUGH FOR ME TO SEND A QUANTUM BOLT IN TO BREAK OPEN WHATEVER WAS CLOGGING IT UP!
NO TIME TO WASTE, I'VE GOT TO TRY TO GET A FIX ON KAYLA'S ROOMMATE.
IF SHE'S ALREADY FIGURED OUT HOW TO USE THE STARBRAND POWER TO THWART DIMENSIONAL PASSAGE, WHAT ELSE HAS SHE ALSO FIGURED OUT?
HEY, I SEE THE LIVING TRIBUNAL, AND ORDER AND CHAOS!
NOW I KNOW SOMETHING HEAVY'S GOING DOWN.
BETTER SEE WHAT.
HUH? THE SILVER SURFER!
QUASAR THE EARTHMAN!
YOU FELT THE COSMOS QUAKE, TOO, DID YOU?
IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING.


HEED ME, ERESHKIGAL. I ACKNOWLEDGE YOU AS A BEING OF VAST POWER... A POTENTIAL PEER TO THE ABSTRACT ENTITIES!
BUT NOT EVEN YOU COULD WITHSTAND THE UNLEASHED POWER OF THE LIVING TRIBUNAL!
CEASE YOUR DISRUPTION OR I WILL ENLIST THE HIGHEST POWERS IN THE MULTIVERSE TO ANNIHILATE YOU!
A TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS. WERE WE OURSELVES TO VIE, THE COSMOS WOULD SUFFER WORSE DEVASTATION THAN YOUR ROCKING OF THE AXIS.
I DON'T RESPOND WELL TO THREATS, THREE-FACE!
I PROPOSE A TOURNAMENT BETWEEN US, ERISHKIGAL.
--AND THE LADY WHO HAS THEM IN A LATHER HAS AN INTERFACE WITH THIS INCREDIBLE POWER FROM BEYOND THIS UNIVERSE...
...A POWER, I'M ASHAMED TO SAY, I'M RESPONSIBLE FOR UNLEASHING...

FROM HER BODY LANGUAGE AND SUCH, I THINK SHE'S *CONVERSING* WITH THE TRIBUNAL. BUT I'M NOT MAKING OUT A *WORD*. YOU?

APPARENTLY THEIR DEBATE IS NOT MEANT FOR *OUR EARS*.

WHAT'S YOUR *GUT FEELING*? YOU THINK WE SHOULD FLY IN AND *BLAST* HER?

LET'S SEE WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE *OUTCOME* OF THEIR DISCOURSE.

YOU HAVE YOUR CHOICE OF CHAMPIONS-- QUASAR, EMISSARY OF EON, AND HIS CHOSEN PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE--

--OR THE SILVER SURFER, SPAWN OF GALACTUS AND SELF-APPOINTED AGENT OF UNIVERSAL PRESERVATION.

WE WOULD TELL THEM THEY MUST BATTLE OR THE MULTIVERSE IS FORFEIT--BUT WE DO NOT TELL THEM WHICH OF US THEY REPRESENT.

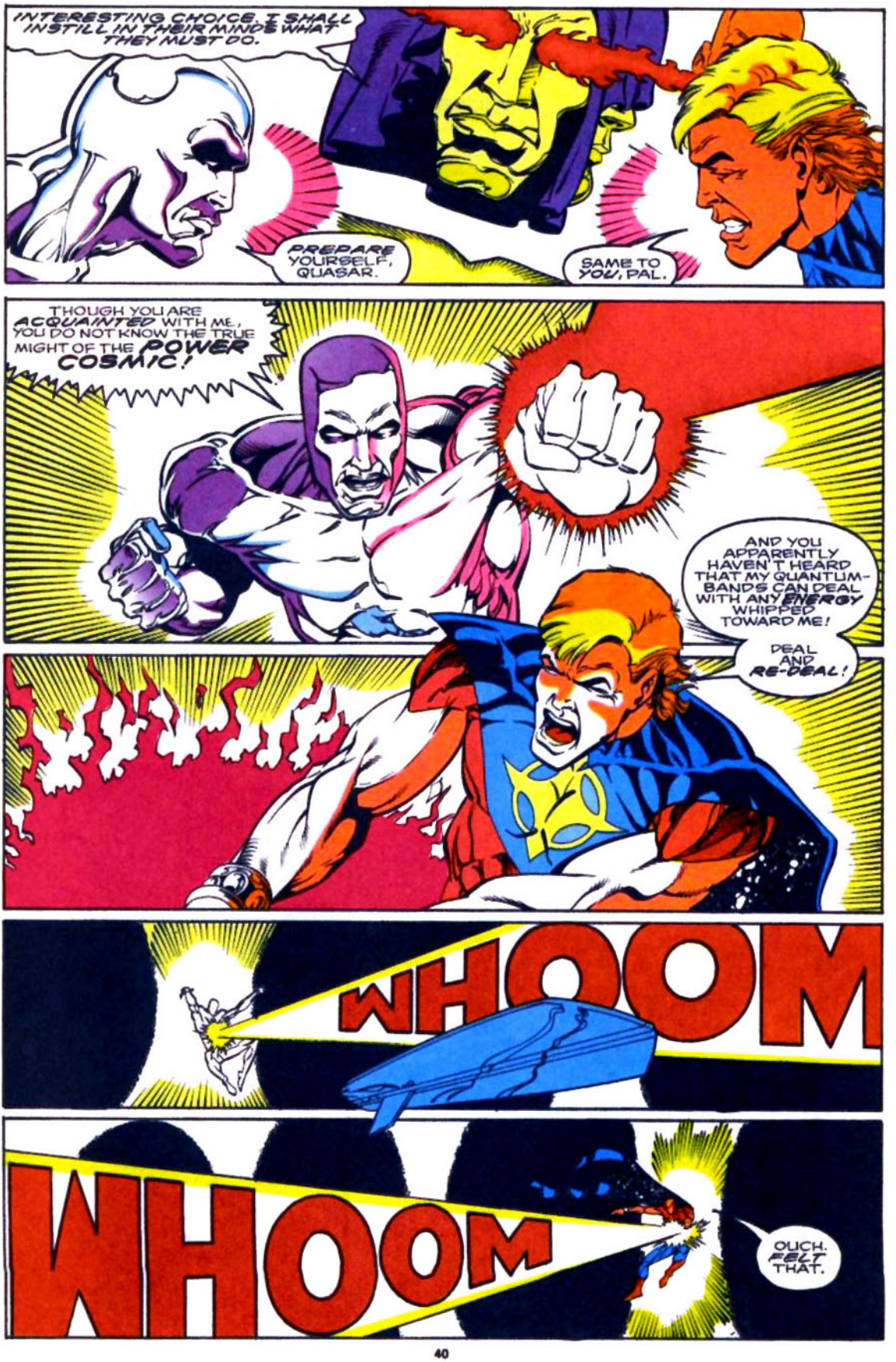
IF YOU WIN, I SHALL SEE YOU ARE UNOPPOSED IN YOUR PLAN FOR MULTIVERSAL MODIFICATION.

IF I WIN, YOU SURRENDER YOUR POWER TO ME.

IS IT A DEAL?

THEN SELECT YOUR CHAMPION.

YES.


INTERESTING CHOICE. I SHALL INSTILL IN THEIR MINDS WHAT THEY MUST DO.
PREPARE YOURSELF, QUASAR.
SAME TO YOU, PAL.
THOUGH YOU ARE ACQUAINTED WITH ME, YOU DO NOT KNOW THE TRUE MIGHT OF THE POWER COSMIC!
AND YOU APPARENTLY HAVEN'T HEARD THAT MY QUANTUM-BANDS CAN DEAL WITH ANY ENERGY WHIPPED TOWARD ME!
DEAL AND RE-DEAL!
WHOOM
WHOOM
OUCH. FELT THAT.

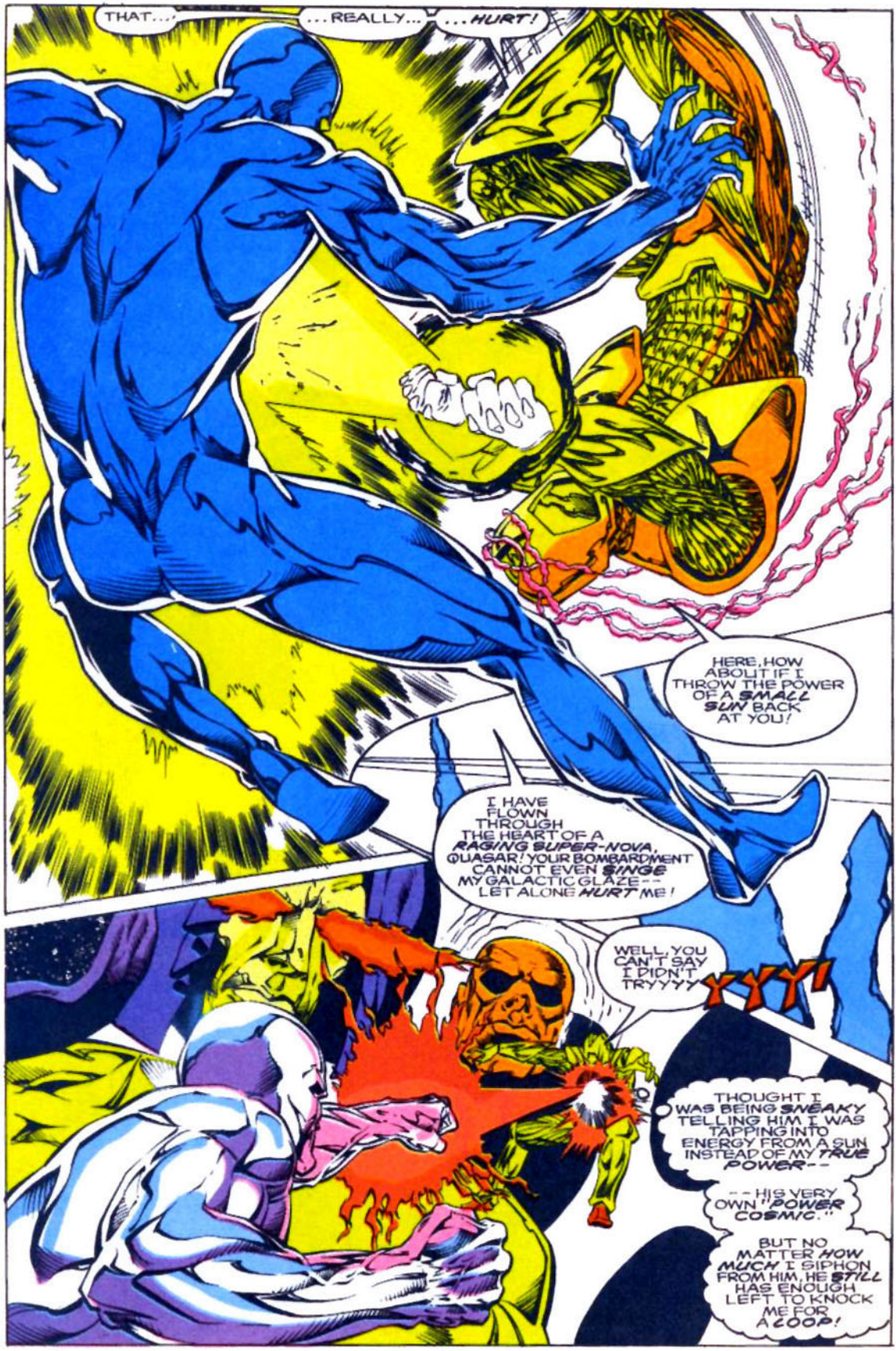
BUT ONCE I ARMOR UP, I WON'T FEEL A THING!
I HAVE NO DESIRE TO DO YOU HARM, QUASAR, BUT IF I MUST VANQUISH YOU TO SAVE THE UNIVERSE...
...BY THE POWER INVESTED IN ME BY GALACTUS, I SHALL DO SO!
NICE SPEECH, SURF. BUT YOU GOT IT BACKWARDS.
I'M THE ONE WHO'S FIGHTING FOR THE SAKE OF THE UNIVERSE.
YOU'RE FIGHTING FOR LITTLE MISS UNIVERSE-WRECKER!

YOU ARE MISTAKEN, EARTHMAN.
YOU MISUNDERSTOOD WHAT YOU WERE TOLD-- OR WERE GIVEN SPURIOUS INFORMATION.

AND WHILE YOUR *QUANTUM-BANDS* ARE WEAPONS OF UNIVERSAL RENOWN, THEY ARE MERELY *INSTRUMENTS* FOR UTILIZING ENERGY...

...WHILE THE SURFER IS *POWER INCARNATE!*

WHUUUUH!


THAT...
...REALLY...
...HURT!
HERE, HOW ABOUT IF I THROW THE POWER OF A SMALL SUN BACK AT YOU!
I HAVE FLOWN THROUGH THE HEART OF A RAGING SUPER-NOVA, QUASAR! YOUR BOMBARDMENT CANNOT EVEN SINGE MY GALACTIC GLAZE-- LET ALONE HURT ME!
WELL, YOU CAN'T SAY I DIDN'T TRYYYY
YYY!
THOUGHT I WAS BEING SNEAKY TELLING HIM I WAS TAPPING INTO ENERGY FROM A SUN INSTEAD OF MY TRUE POWER--
--HIS VERY OWN "POWER COSMIC."
BUT NO MATTER HOW MUCH I SIPHON FROM HIM, HE STILL HAS ENOUGH LEFT TO KNOCK ME FOR A LOOP!

HEY, THAT'S ODD. I JUST NOTICED SOMETHING.
MASTER ORDER SEEMS TO HAVE GROWN AGAIN...AND IT WAS RIGHT AFTER SURFER DELIVERED ME TWO SUCCESSFUL HITS...!
CAN THERE BE A CONNECTION? AND IS THAT CONNECTION THAT BY BEATING ME, THE SURFER IS CONTRIBUTING TO ORDER IN THE UNIVERSE?
IN OTHER WORDS, HAVE I BEEN BAMBOOZLED INTO THINKING I'M ON THE SIDE OF THE GOOD GUYS, WHEN ACTUALLY, I'M THE WINGED-LADY'S CHAMPION OF CHAOS?
LET ME CHECK OUT MY THEORY...LET SURF POUND ON ME SOME MORE AND SEE IF ORDER REGAINS HIS NORMAL SIZE!
VOOOSH
AND AFTER A LONG INTERVAL, A RELENTLESS BARRAGE, AND JUST ENOUGH RESISTANCE TO MAKE HIS POOR SHOWING CREDIBLE...
YES--HE'S GETTING BIGGER STILL! I THINK MY THEORY'S RIGHT!
THAT MEANS--*GULP*--THAT I'VE GOT TO LET THE SURFER BEAT THE LIVING CRUD OUT OF ME IN ORDER FOR ORDER TO WIN THE DAY!
TRIBUNAL, I HAVE WON!
THE UNIVERSE HAS BEEN SAVED!

NOOOOOO!
ZVASSH
WHAT HAPPENS--TO THE WOMAN?!?
RATHER THAN SURRENDER THE STARBRAND TO ME, ERESHKIGAL HAS ANNIHILATED HERSELF.
NO MATTER. I HAVE REMOVED THE OFFENDING POWER SOURCE FROM HER REMAINS.
AND WHILE I CANNOT POSSESS IT WITHOUT FORFEITING MY OWN LIMITLESS AUTHORITY...
...I CAN DETERMINE WHERE BEST TO DISPOSE OF IT.
SAY, SURFER--?
AH, NEVER MIND.
YOU TWO PHYSICAL BEINGS MAY LEAVE WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT YOU HAVE BOTH SERVED THE MULTIVERSE WELL.
I SHALL DIRECT YOU TO YOUR RESPECTIVE NEXUSES.

I FELT LIKE TELLING HIM I'M REALLY NOT AS WUSSY AS I ACTED LIKE...BUT WHY SHOULD I CARE WHAT THE COOLEST CHARACTER IN THE ENTIRE COSMOS THINKS OF ME?
RIGHT NOW I'M MORE ANXIOUS TO GET TO EARTH AND TELL KAYLA EVERYTHING'S FINE.
AND...
HOLD! SOMETHING'S EMERGING FROM THE NEXUS!
QUASAR!
HEY, WHAT A WELCOMING COMMITTEE!
IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE MULTIVERSAL CALAMITY I HAVE BROUGHT YOU ALL HERE TO COMBAT...
...IS OVER?
OH, WENDELL--ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? YOU LOOK LIKE YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH THE WRINGER!
I'LL BE OKAY. THE IMPORTANT THING IS THE UNIVERSE IS SAFE FROM YOUR ROOMMATE--
--IN NO SMALL PART DUE TO THE FACT THAT I LOST A FIGHT!
END